MALTREATMENT EXPERIENCES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

Children's Data Network

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Children's Data Network is a university, agency, and community collaborative focused on the integration and application of data to inform programs and policies for children and their families. The network is a university-based data and research collaborative that specializes in the linkage and analysis of administrative records to inform children's programs and policies. The network operates in partnership with the California Child Welfare Indicators Project at the University of California, Berkeley.

SUMMARY OF PUBLICATION

Eastman, A.L., Herz, D.C., Palmer, L. & McCroskey, J. (2023) Comparing Maltreatment Experiences for Young People with Child Protection or Dual System Involvement. Child Adolesc Soc Work J (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-023-00918-z

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KEY FINDINGS

Dual system involvement (i.e., involvement with both child protective services (CPS) and the juvenile justice system) was examined using 1998–2001 birth cohorts of young people with CPS involvement between birth and age 18 (N = 228,251). Administrative data from the California Department of Social Services and the Los Angeles County Probation Department were linked through 2019 to examine how maltreatment allegations differed for young people with CPS only and dual system involvement. Key findings from this study included:

- Young people with dual system involvement had significantly more investigations than young people who only experienced CPS involvement between birth and age 18.
- Two thirds of young people with dual system involvement (68%) experienced two or more allegation types (i.e., neglect and physical abuse), compared with less than half of young people with CPS only involvement (46%).
- Allegations of neglect with physical abuse were common in the full population (21%), but young people with dual system involvement were even more likely to experience this combination of allegations (44%).
- More than three quarters of girls (77%) and Black young people (75%) with dual system involvement experienced more than one type of maltreatment.
- Eleven percent of young people with CPS only involvement experienced Sexual Abuse with Another Allegation compared to 22.7% of young people with dual system involvement and 38.6% of girls with dual system involvement.

This brief is one of a series of analyses leveraging linked CPS and probation records to unpack dual system involvement. The findings from the current study highlight the complex and multifaceted CPS histories and experiences of young people with dual system involvement. These findings should facilitate discussion of gender-responsive services for young people with traumatic sexual experiences, given the frequency of sexual abuse allegations among young people with dual system involvement.

INTRODUCTION

The Children's Data Network at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and the School of Criminalistics and Criminal Justice at California State University, Los Angeles collaborated to describe juvenile justice involvement for young people with child protective services (CPS) involvement (i.e., dual system). Administrative data were linked to identify CPS involvement and whether each young person was eventually petitioned to the Los Angeles (LA) Superior Court's Dependency Court for a delinquency charge.

The previous study that used these records found that among all young people who had contact with CPS in LA County between birth and age 18, 5.0% experienced a delinquency court petition by age 18 years (Eastman et al., 2022). The study showed important variations in the risk of dual system involvement by gender, race and ethnicity, and the extent of CPS involvement (e.g., maltreatment investigation only, open case, foster care placement) but did not examine how specific types of maltreatment allegations may set the stage for higher likelihood of subsequent juvenile justice system involvement. The current study explored the relationship between the number and type of allegations and dual system involvement.

STUDY DATA AND METHOD

CPS records for LA County were accessed from the California Department of Social Services and used to identify the 1998–2001 birth cohorts of young people who were involved with the CPS system between birth and age 18 (N = 228,251). Once the cohorts were identified, CPS records were matched to records from the LA County Probation Department to document which young people in the cohort had been petitioned to the Juvenile Delinquency Court between ages 10 and 18 (i.e., between 2008 and 2019). Dates of involvement were reviewed based on records matched across systems. About 1% (n = 348) of young people who experienced contact with both systems had a juvenile court delinquency petition prior to their CPS involvement. These young people were excluded from the study to ensure the integrity of temporal ordering (i.e., CPS involvement first). The prior study based on this linkage (Eastman et al., 2022) showed demographics for the full population of young people with CPS and dual system involvement (n = 228,251).

Allegation types were documented for each allegation between birth and age 18 and prior to the first probation petition date. Allegations were divided into a single maltreatment type if the young person had only received one allegation type between birth and age 18 or multiple maltreatment types if two or more allegation types were documented. Single and multiple maltreatment types were organized based on common maltreatment allegation types (Lau et al., 2005). The CPS only and dual system groups were compared using chi-square ($\chi 2$) analyses and t-tests to assess statistically significant differences in allegation types. Significance values are documented based on t-tests for continuous variables and $\chi 2$ tests for categorical variables. A p-value less than .05 shows a statistically significant difference between groups.

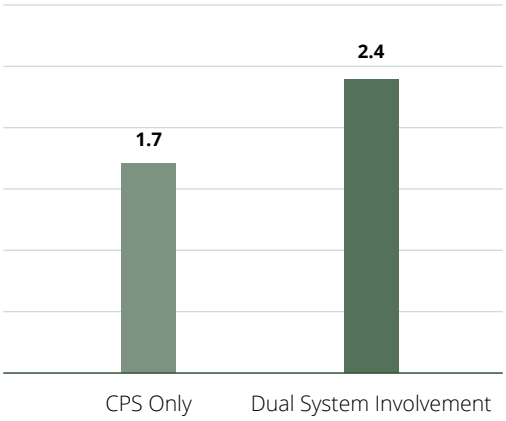
RESULTS

ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN THE NUMBER OF ALLEGATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CPS ONLY OR DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT?

Young people with dual system involvement had significantly more investigations than young people with CPS only involvement ($p < .001$).

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE NUMBER OF INVESTIGATIONS

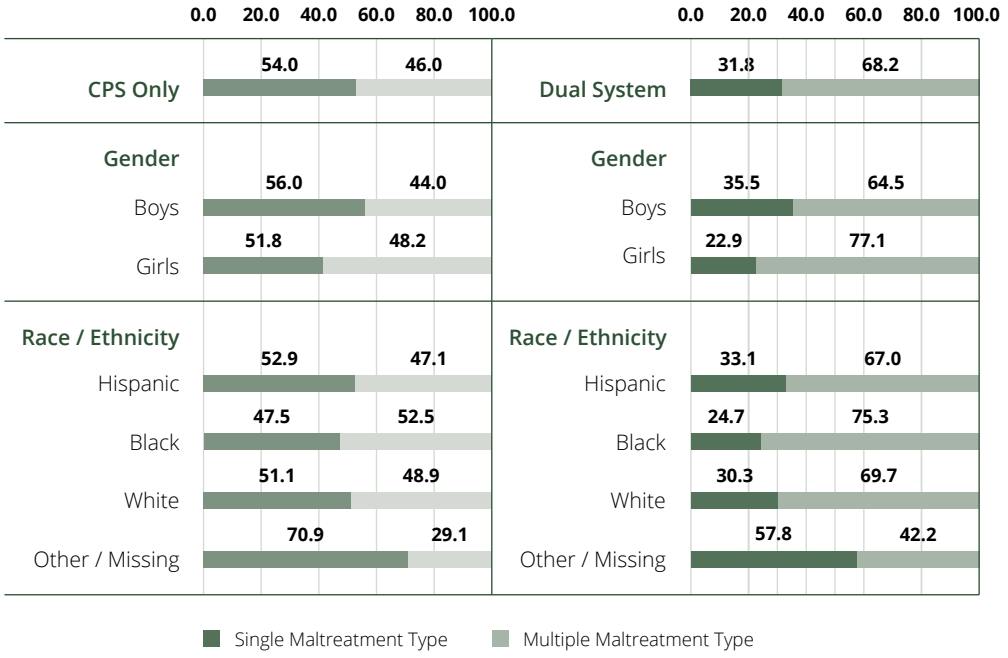
YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CPS ONLY INVOLVEMENT HAD 1.7 INVESTIGATIONS, ON AVERAGE, BETWEEN BIRTH AND AGE 18, WHEREAS YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT HAD 2.4 INVESTIGATIONS, ON AVERAGE.



ARE THERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE LIKELIHOOD OF SINGLE OR MULTIPLE MALTREATMENT TYPES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CPS ONLY OR DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT?

Almost half of the young people in the study population (47.0%) experienced multiple types of maltreatment. Figure 2 shows that among young people with CPS only involvement, 46.0% of young people experienced multiple types of maltreatment, with little variation across gender and race and ethnicity aside from a small subpopulation for which race and ethnicity was designated as "other."

FIGURE 2. MULTIPLE TYPES OF MALTREATMENT AMOUNG YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CPS ONLY AND DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT



In comparison to young people with CPS only involvement, two thirds of those with dual system involvement experienced multiple kinds of maltreatment (68.2%, $p < .001$). Figure 2 shows that among young people with dual system involvement, girls (compared to boys) and Black young people (compared to other races and ethnicities) were overrepresented among young people with multiple types of maltreatment. Specifically, among girls with dual system involvement, 77.1% experienced more than one allegation type by age 18, compared with 64.5% of boys with dual system involvement ($p < .001$). Young people with dual system involvement who were Black were more likely to experience multiple types of maltreatment by age 18 (75.3%), which was higher than the proportion of young people with dual system involvement who were White (69.7%) or Hispanic (67.0%).

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON ALLEGATION TYPES?

Table 1 displays the most common allegation types for the study population as a whole and for young people with dual system involvement. Neglect only and neglect with physical abuse were the most common allegations among the full population, aside from other maltreatment. Other maltreatment was defined as any allegation type or types that were uncommon or had lower risk of negative developmental outcomes (e.g., sibling at risk, neglect, and emotional abuse).

TABLE 1. ALLEGATION TYPES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CPS CONTACT FROM BIRTH (1998–2001 BIRTH COHORTS) THROUGH AGE 18 AND THOSE WITH JUVENILE PROBATION INVOLVEMENT

Allegation type	CPS only (n = 217,370)		Dual system (n = 10,881)		X^2
	n	col%	n	col%	p-value
Neglect with physical abuse	57,802	21.3	4,805	44.2	3100.0***
Sexual abuse with another allegation	30,122	11.1	2,473	22.7	1100.0***
Neglect only	53,460	19.7	1,684	15.5	814.6***
Physical abuse only	22,795	8.4	730	6.7	40.3***
Emotional abuse only	21,167	7.8	385	3.5	268.7***
Sexual abuse only	10,041	3.7	248	2.3	57.6***
Other maltreatment	88,467	32.6	2,153	19.8	780.6***

Note. In instances where neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse were all documented for the same young person, they were categorized as both (1) neglect with physical abuse and (2) sexual abuse with another maltreatment.

***p < .001.

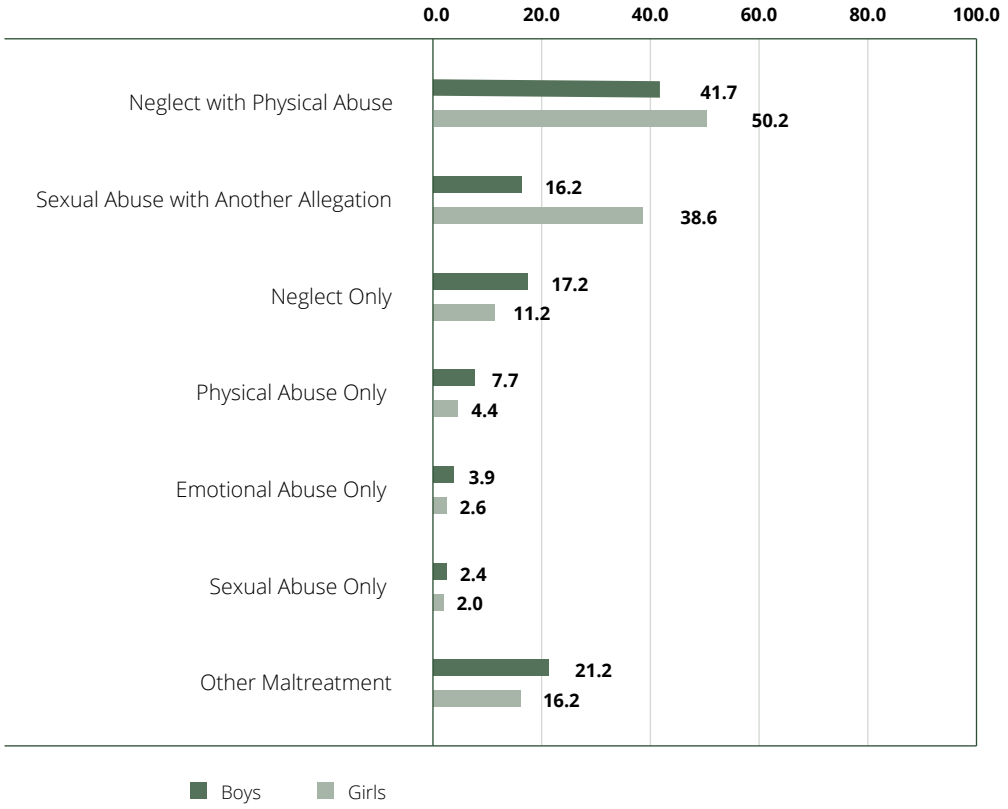
HOW DID ALLEGATION TYPES DIFFER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CPS ONLY COMPARED WITH DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT?

The multiple types of allegations (i.e., neglect with physical abuse, sexual abuse with another allegation) were significantly more common among young people with dual system involvement than among young people with CPS involvement only. Specifically, 44.2% of young people with dual system involvement had experienced both a neglect and physical abuse allegation, compared with 21.3% of young people with CPS only involvement ($p < .001$). Further, 22.7% of young people with dual system involvement experienced sexual abuse with another allegation, compared with 11.2% of young people with CPS only involvement ($p < .001$).

ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN ALLEGATION TYPES BY DEMOGRAPHICS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT?

Figure 3 displays allegation types for young people with dual system involvement by gender. The differences between boys and girls by allegation type were significant at the $p < .001$ level. Results show 38.6% of girls experienced sexual abuse with another allegation compared to 16.2% of boys ($p < .001$). After controlling for gender, there were few meaningful differences in the type of allegation by race and ethnicity.

FIGURE 3. ALLEGATION TYPE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DUAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT, BY GENDER



POLICY QUESTIONS

Study findings highlight three policy questions that should be answered in order to improve planning and service coordination for young people who may experience dual system involvement.

1. **Are there ways to reduce the need for repeat CPS involvement for young people at risk of dual system involvement?** The results of the study showed girls and Black young people with dual system involvement had more CPS involvement in comparison to boys and young people of other races and ethnicities with dual system involvement.

Further, a history of multiple allegation types was overwhelmingly common for these groups. The results may suggest there is increased concern about these young people and their families from community reporters and that concern may not be effectively resolved. If efforts, such as the County's project "Moving Families from Hotline to a Helpline," continue to provide families with access to preventative services and supports, these strategies may reduce the need for repeat CPS involvement and yield subsequent reductions in juvenile justice system involvement.

2. **Is a history of multiple allegation types reflective of the presence of different kinds of family risk factors occurring in the home among young people with dual system involvement?** Young people with dual system involvement commonly experienced both physical abuse and neglect or sexual abuse and another maltreatment type (predominately neglect). When neglect is alleged along with another type of maltreatment, it may suggest lack of oversight or parental attention that could help prevent subsequent involvement with the juvenile justice system. Allegations of neglect largely indicate parental substance use, mental illness, and domestic violence (Palmer, et al., 2022). The results of the current study highlight the need for community-based supports for both the young people and their caregivers that ideally would be offered prior to an escalation to physical or sexual abuse.

3. **What gender responsive strategies can be implemented in both systems to address the history of sexual abuse among girls with dual system involvement?** This study provides evidence of how common sexual abuse is among young people with dual system involvement and should encourage additional attention to the targeted services needed by young people with traumatic sexual experiences. Prior research has established that experiences of sexual abuse are tied to mental and behavioral health issues in adolescence and stressed the importance for child sexual assault survivors to receive and complete treatment (Noll, 2021).

BRIDGING RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

Policy changes that may improve practice for young people with complex and multifaceted CPS histories are underway. California established the System of Care for Children and Youth with the implementation of AB 2083 (Chapter 815, Statutes of 2018). This law requires a statewide plan for a trauma-informed, therapeutic continuum of care to support young people in care in the least restrictive setting. It also requires comprehensive and coordinated service delivery for young people in care with co-occurring and complex needs. The current study suggests that many young people and families who experienced multiple investigations and

allegation types throughout their childhood may benefit from access to community-based, trauma-informed services and supports.

Increased vulnerabilities of girls, especially girls of color, who have contact with the juvenile justice system have been a recent focus of LA County policies. In 2021, the LA County Board of Supervisors passed a motion titled *Decarceration of Girls and Young Women: Addressing the Incarcerated Youth Population in the Los Angeles County Camps and Halls.* This motion provides funding to reduce the incarcerated population of girls and young women and enhance the provision of wraparound services for detained girls and young women upon release. Knowing that girls and Black youth with multiple allegation types face a higher risk of dual system involvement suggests that statewide and local efforts to enhance the capacity and delivery of trauma-informed care may reduce juvenile justice system involvement. The findings of the current study should support continued discussion of gender-responsive services for young people with traumatic sexual experiences and complex maltreatment histories. Investing in specialized programs to prevent young people from being caught up in the juvenile justice system is good public policy. The cost of community-based prevention programs is a fraction of the cost of incarceration and most importantly, it is a much better option for young people, their families, and our communities.

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